

The University of Chicago

THE PLACE OF MARX IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

1939

By
ELIZABETH PAXTON LAM

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of the relation of Marxism to Christianity rises persistently and frequently in the forefront of Christian thought today. It is marked by confusing and contradictory estimates of the worth of Marx to our generation. Although Marx died in 1883, it was not until after the World War that his thought was given serious consideration by Christian thinkers. In order to explain why this is true, we shall have to indicate the historical setting out of which Marx's system of thought came and the factors which led Christian critics of social problems to the study of Marx. This will show why the subject of this thesis is an issue of contemporary importance.

In the period preceding 1918 there is a wealth of literature which reveals the concern of Christians for the economic and social problems of capitalism. This on the whole assumes the sociological and philosophical views of social progress which dominated the nineteenth century. The guiding principles for the amelioration of conditions were: liberty for the individual, that is, freedom from restraint; the right of each individual to develop his inherent capacities; and the use of reason in effecting social change. It was thought that these principles, which were also objectives, might be realized within the framework of capitalism. The economic theories of the period, which claimed to be descriptive of things as they are, on the whole corroborated this view. It was believed that in the "natural" course of events the rational pursuit by each individual of his own ends would make for the good of all. It seemed, therefore, but a matter of time, improved technique, and education before all these malignant social diseases would be cured. The attitude toward social reform was accordingly one of optimism. Mastery over nature, an achievement of the last one hundred years, gave a false sense of control over human events. Belief in biological evolution was paralleled by confidence in social evolution. Through all human history one increasing purpose seemed to run.

The World War, however, shot to pieces this optimism. It revealed how deep rooted are the forces of evil and how defiant

of rational control. It brought to light the malignancy of economic problems—world-wide unemployment, the economic roots of war, the recurring trade cycle of boom and depression. In the face of such catastrophes the optimism of nineteenth century social and Christian theory seemed inadequate.

The one movement of social reform, however, which remained undefeated by the war was Marxist Communism. In Russia it burst into full-fledged maturity. From being a mere movement of hope and expectation, it became the actual blueprint of the new union of Soviet republics. Here Marxism was claimed to be a fait accompli. But the vitality of Marxism was not manifested only in Russia. Fervent and devoted groups of Marx's followers sprang up in all parts of the world.

Why, we ask, did these various movements claim Marx as their founder and view his writings as the authoritative and complete guide to social reconstruction? To answer this question pushes us back to the situation in which Marx lived and wrote. Born in Treves in 1818, Marx grew to maturity at the time when the full effects of the Industrial Revolution on human life were beginning to be manifest. In contrast to most of his contemporaries who concentrated upon the material gains which the machine was bringing, Marx turned to the effect which it was having upon human beings. He saw the technical displacement of hand labor and its concomitant, unemployment on a devastating scale; the nervous disabilities of the workers due to long hours of mechanical toil; unhealthy, congested living quarters which sprang up around the factories; and, finally, the contrast between the poverty of the masses and the unprecedented wealth of the few.

The economic theory of his day attempted no explanation of how such conditions came to be or how they could be ameliorated. It aimed not to prescribe what life ought to be but merely to describe what actually is. Against this view Marx fundamentally reacted. The human factor became for him of paramount significance. He maintained that human values could never be given the place of supreme importance under any kind of capitalistic system. The ideals of his day, liberty for the individual, the rights of free competition, and reliance upon government action seemed to him remote and irrelevant. What was needed, Marx contended, was a new economic system, a totally different social order in which there should be security, the opportunity of all to an honest and

steady livelihood, and freedom from the destructive forces of economic competition. Others besides Marx had expressed their longings for a new society and pictured an utopian world. But Marx moved beyond the mere projection of an ideal to a prescription for its attainment. Herein lies his significance and his enduring influence. He set on foot an international labor movement, claimed to give to it convincing proof of the justice of its cause, and put in its hands a weapon of social change. In addition to that, he prophetically predicted the future progression of events, leading ultimately to the denouement of capitalism.

Marx's followers claim that his analysis of the causes of social ills and the practicality of his ideal have been verified by events since 1917. What had Christians to offer which was as thorough-going, fundamental, and practically feasible as the Communist program? This question many honest Christian reformers found forced upon them. But historically Marx had opposed religion and Christianity in particular. His followers carried on the tradition of condemning religion as an "opiate" and an "ideology." There were other elements in Marx which were equally as confusing and bewildering. He attacked many of the cherished values of modern culture—values which even those most desirous of social change were unwilling to relinquish. Chief among these was the right of the individual to make his own decision and the use of persuasion in effecting social change. These negative elements, moreover, were anything but passive and insignificant in Marxism. These seemed incompatible with the highest ideals and principles and made many Christian thinkers who were honestly seeking a "way out" recoil.

Those who took this position condemned Marxism in toto and maintained that "the sincere and intelligent Christian need not accept and ought not to accept either Marxist economics or Marx's philosophy."¹ Such an attitude forecloses any objective analysis of what Marx had to say.

Others maintain that Marx put his finger upon the major problems of our day but knew not how to solve them. They take the attitude expressed in the words of H. G. Wells: "He [Marx]

¹H. G. Wood, Communism, Christian and Marxist (London: Epworth Press, 1935), p. 31.

diagnoses a disease admirably and then suggests rather an incantation than a remedy."¹

Still others, not to be frightened by the traditional chasm between Marx and Christianity, have tackled the entire system of Marx. These maintain that it is possible to sift the wheat from the tares in his entire system of thought and to absorb into Christian theory and social reform whatever in Marx has validity. It is from this group, if any, that light on Marx's real meaning and relation to Christianity is to be found. For the purposes of this thesis, four individuals were selected from those Christian thinkers who take this attitude toward Marx: John Macmurray, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Nicholas Berdyaev. These men were selected not only because of their extensive analysis of Marx's thought but also because each has won a recognized place of leadership in the field of Christian thought. They represent very different Christian traditions and social backgrounds but have in common an attitude of honest inquiry and a deep sense of responsibility for the social conditions of the day.

Macmurray is of Scotch origin and at present holds the chair of logic at the University of London. He is one of the leaders of the Christian Left, a liberal Protestant movement in England with socialistic objectives and a writer and speaker of wide influence in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. He writes as a layman of the relationship of Christianity to Marxism.

Niebuhr was for many years the minister of an evangelical church in Detroit. There he found himself up against the moral and social complexities of a large industrial center. It was in this environment that his concern for social reconstruction deepened and crystalized. He gave up this position to teach Christian ethics and theology at Union Theological Seminary. He is an outstanding American critic of the contemporary scene and the modern Christian temper.

Paul Tillich, now also a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, was until recent years a leader of German social and religious thought in Germany. Following the World War he actively participated in the cause of social democracy and

¹Harold Laski, Karl Marx (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1922), p. 45.

edited the periodical Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus. He has taught both theology and philosophy in various German universities and published books upon problems of Christian theology, ethics, and philosophy. Two of his books which have been translated into English and numerous articles in periodicals have brought him to the attention of the English speaking world. As a figure in the field of Christian thought Tillich is of unquestionable significance.

Nicolas Berdyaev is a member of the liberal wing of the Russian Orthodox Church which made its influence felt long before the revolution. Upon the victory of the Bolsheviks, Berdyaev became professor of philosophy in the University of Moscow. Very shortly thereafter his unorthodox communist views led to his departure from Russia. He now lives in Paris, teaches at the Sorbonne, and edits a review called The Way. From his pen come a continuous stream of volumes upon problems of theology and Christian ethics. These are translated into several languages and have made Berdyaev a Christian thinker internationally known.

This thesis will analyze the elements in the Christian ethics and theology of these critics which are directly traceable to Marx. In order to give unity to the discussion of these four critics the following proposition is laid down:

The differences in the critics' analyses of the relationship of Marx to Christian thought vary in accordance with their sociological background and philosophical views, and produce four issues in Christian ethics and theology directly traceable to Marx.

Further explanation of this proposition must await the course of its treatment in the body of this thesis. The plan of treatment follows through four steps: (1) An analysis of Marx's total system of thought. (2) An analysis of the four critics' analyses of Marx. In this analysis we shall show that Niebuhr and Tillich understand Marx; that Macmurray misconstrues almost the entire system of Marx; and that Berdyaev at certain particular points misinterprets Marx. (3) An analysis of the critics' sociological and philosophical assumptions which will explain the correctness of Niebuhr's and Tillich's analyses, the aberrations of Macmurray's analysis, and the misinterpretations of Berdyaev's as stated in (2). (4) An abstraction of the different issues produced in the foregoing analyses which will constitute the four issues in Christian ethics and theology directly traceable to Marx.

Step (1) of this proposition is contained in Chapter I.

Steps (2), (3), and (4) indicate the method of analysis which is followed in each of the four succeeding chapters dealing with the thought of the critics. The final chapter formulates systematically and critically the problems and issues raised for Christian ethics and theology by Marx.¹

¹There is reproduced here only the "essential portion" of the dissertation, consisting of the Introduction and the Conclusion. The complete dissertation is to be found only in the University of Chicago Libraries.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the four preceding chapters we have shown that the differences in the critics' analyses of the relation of Marx to Christian thought vary in accordance with their sociological backgrounds and philosophical views. In these chapters the material has been organized in terms of what the particular critic under consideration deemed significant or important in Marx's system. This meant, as nearly as possible, approaching the problem of the relation of Marx to Christian thought from the viewpoint and in the terms of each critic. We are now in a position to see the general outlines of the major issues which appear when the critics' treatments of Marx are seen over against the total system of Marx as set forth in Chapter I. This final chapter, consequently, offers an opportunity for us to point out in a more conclusive way the extent to which the Christian writers have grasped and treated critically the material of Marx. It will also bring out their major differences in handling the problem, enabling us to make comparative judgments of the worth of their treatments of Marx. For the way in which the issues are stated and for the evaluative judgments the writer takes full responsibility.

We are able to distinguish four major problems. These actually shade one into the other, but for purposes of clarity and understanding some such artificial arrangement of the material is necessary and useful. Before plunging into the discussion of the four issues, we shall attempt a brief definition of what they are.

In the first place, it has become apparent that treatment of certain aspects of Marx's thought is dependent upon knowledge of the social sciences. One of the major claims of Marx was the disclosure of certain factors in economic and social relationships under capitalism of which his contemporaries were ignorant or unaware. The elaboration of these observations constitutes a major portion of Marx's writings. In any empirical approach to social ethics the validity of these insights cannot be determined except by scientific investigation. This then is a problem for the

social sciences, not for ethics. It is a problem, however, that is of relevance and significance for ethical judgment, since competence in the treatment of any social ethical problem is dependent upon the width of the factual base. We have seen, for example, that certain of the aberrations in Macmurray's treatment of Marx was due to lack of discrimination in distinguishing between problems which can be treated only in terms of the data of the social sciences and those which depend upon the judgment of moral conscience. In summarizing this aspect of the total problem, we shall point out the extent to which the critics incorporate Marx's sociology and economics in their system of ethics.

The second problem has to do with the ethical criteria Marx used in criticizing social and economic arrangements under capitalism. These principles from one viewpoint constitute a judgment upon the existing order and from another viewpoint objectives toward which to strive. These then are the second element in Marx's system and as such confront Christian ethics on its own ground. We shall note the extent to which the critics accept as valid on Christian grounds these principles of Marx.

The third problem involves the process and issues of moving from things as they are to things as they should be. This is the problem of "method" in social reconstruction. Marx claimed to have set forth a novel method, relating it organically to his interpretation of social phenomena. There is the widest diversity of opinion among the critics in the treatment of this crucial phase of Marx's thought to Christian ethics.

And, finally, we shall take up the bearing which "fact," principles, and methodology have upon metaphysics or theology. Marx, although setting forth no explicit system of metaphysics, cannot be understood apart from his philosophic assumptions. These the critics lift out, analyze, and judge in the light of Christian theology. It is clear that for them ethics cannot stop short of the question of man's ultimate destiny and the widest and deepest meaning of social salvation.

The Relation of Marxist Sociology to Christian Ethics

To return to the "given" in Marx's system, we need only to recall to mind the concepts which represented to him the essential characteristics of capitalism. These are the phenomenon of class conflict, irreconcilable because of fundamental differences

in bargaining power due to the nature of capitalism; the disclosure of "exploitation," which Marx defined in terms of surplus value; and the nature of "ideology." These, Marx thought, could be traced solely to the capitalistic mode of production.

We find all four critics agreeing with Marx that the social structure contains elements of class conflict. They all repudiate with Marx the Utilitarian concept of economic relationships, namely, that individuals in pursuing their own best interests contribute to the good of all. There is not agreement, however, as to whether this conflict of group interests is due solely to the mechanism of capitalism and can therefore be eliminated under a different mode of production or whether it involves other social factors neglected by Marx, which would persist in any social order.

Berdyaev takes the essentially Marxist position here and thinks that class conflict would vanish under socialism. Macmurray, who fails to distinguish between Marx's principles of the ideal and his observations of contemporary social conditions, has no discussion of this problem. Niebuhr grants Marx's premises that capitalism is the cause of the most brutal conflict in society today but he gives, not Marx's economic explanation of why this persists, but a socio-psychological account of the phenomena. In contrast to the Marxian exposition of the unequal bargaining power of the two classes due to the nature of capitalism, Niebuhr explains that the complexity of collective life makes impossible a reciprocal or sympathetic relationship between groups widely separated by occupational, cultural, and social differences. The achievement of intra-group solidarity is accompanied, thinks Niebuhr, by attacks upon "enemy" groups. The lust for power, moreover, is so stubbornly and inherently of the nature of group life that once a group has power, it is unable to relinquish voluntarily that power. Tillich does not agree with Niebuhr that the social structure is characterized solely by conflict. The capitalistic system does produce group antagonisms—this Marxist doctrine Tillich accepts—but he maintains that this does not give the complete picture of the social structure. There are loyalties, values, and objectives which are common to both classes and which make possible whatever degree of unity and solidarity do exist in social life. This problem was recognized by Berdyaev but not elaborated by him. Tillich considers this a problem for sociological investigation and quotes modern sociolo-

gists to support his position.

None of the critics are clear in their statements as to why injustice and exploitation occur under capitalism. Marx gives an explanation in the technical terms of "surplus value" which attempts to show why such conditions must necessarily accompany the present mode of production. But at no point do the critics discuss this concept—basic to the whole Marxian indictment of capitalism. It is this factor in the productive system which led Marx to state that no increase of wages will ever remedy the mutual antagonism of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Unless this, or some other explanation is given, the question may be legitimately raised as to whether the critics' indictment of capitalism is due to the fact that the system cannot "work," or to the fact that it does not "work."¹ Unless some such analysis of the cause of injustice under capitalism is made clear the indictment by the critics of the injustice of capitalism, even though made in allegedly Marxist phrases, does not necessarily condemn the system.²

There are other elements in Marx's thought which offer a basis for indicting capitalism, although for him the theory of surplus value was primary. His analysis of the trade cycle, that is, periods of boom and depression, the problem of over-production, technical unemployment, and the growth of monopolies reveal the essentially irrational character of the present system and the need for central planning, so Niebuhr, Berdyaev, and Tillich contend. Although these were related definitely by Marx to his theory of surplus value, it is possible to disassociate them. This Niebuhr at one point states as his position.

It is clear that the critics cannot judge this phase of Marx's thought except in terms of its scientific validity. It does not involve principles of Christian ethics but knowledge of

¹This statement is repeatedly made by Professor Frank Knight in his lectures and writings.

²In this connection, the critics give no recognition to many contemporary economists who are aware of the human and ethical problems raised by capitalism, but who think that an enterprise economy can be made to "work." Professor Knight's vigorous and penetrating analyses are representative of this view. Cf. "Ethics and Economics," Economica, VI (February, 1939).

the social sciences. The divergences in the critics' treatment of these elements in Marx reveal their varied backgrounds in the social sciences and their limitations in treating the technical problems of Marxist socialism.¹

Berdyaev, Niebuhr, and Tillich agree that one of Marx's greatest contributions to Christian thought is his theory of ideology. Its disclosure of the sociological rootings of knowledge reveals the extent to which knowledge is colored by class prejudice. It becomes a weapon in their hands to dissect the accepted systems of thought and to root out social hypocrisies and unconscious sociological deceptions. They apply it with equal honesty to Christian and Marxist ideas. In this respect they are more deliberately self-critical than Marx was. All three critics recognize that they themselves are the products of particular sociological backgrounds and that Christian ideals are justly subject to the Marxist charge of ideology. Consequently, they welcome Marx's insight as a method of attaining greater objectivity.

There is not unanimity as to the validity of the Marxist doctrine of proletariat truth. Berdyaev bluntly asserts that there cannot be "class truth" for such would deny to those who are not members of the chosen class the capacity to perceive the truth. Moreover, it would deny the universal nature of truth itself. Niebuhr expresses sympathy with the claim of the proletariat to greater objectivity and hence to a clearer grasp of truth, but he points out that this very detachment from the culture of their day may make the proletariat blind to the real values which are present in life. Tillich accepts as true the Marxist theory that truth is perceived by those who are most acutely aware of the sociological contradictions in which they are living. In contrast to other social classes the proletariat is compelled to realize that class divisions which estrange man from man exist. Since they are the victims of the economic system, there cannot be any unconscious effort on their part to veil the actual state of things. They are thus in a position to disclose the ideological

¹Since Marx, economists have brought to light certain economic data which make Marx's technical explanation inadequate. Socialist economists are revising Marx to take these into consideration. Berdyaev, Niebuhr, and Macmurray give no attention to this development of socialist theory. Tillich, however, refers to some of the contemporary German socialist economists and their work.

character of accepted systems of thought. Tillich explains that the articulation of these insights will be made by the "typical" rather than the "actual" proletariat. The former consists of those individuals who have deliberately joined the ranks of the proletariat from some other social position. The contradictions of the social situation come to greatest acuteness in the experience of these "border-line" persons and is therefore conducive to objectivity.

It is thus clear that Tillich clarifies and gives more content to the theory of ideology than is found in Marx. In order to recognize the relativism of all knowledge Tillich adds to the Marxist prerequisite, that of identification with the proletariat cause, the second condition of religious commitment.

Macmurray has no discussion of the problem of ideology as defined in this thesis. He states that Marx recognized the sociological rootings of knowledge and the extent to which class divisions color philosophy but there is no thorough-going application of Marx's theory either to Communism or to Christian thought. This is to be expected in the light of his aberrations in interpreting the class-struggle and the rôle assigned the proletariat. It is to be expected in view of his general analysis that there would be no treatment of the rôle of the proletariat in the removal of the sociological bias of knowledge.

The recognition of the critics of the truth of this phase of Marx's thought may be viewed as corroboration of religious intuitions which they had previously held and which Christians had known before Marx, but this does not lessen their appreciation for the sociological validity of Marx's theory of ideology.

The Relation of Marxist Ethical Principles to Christian Ethics

The second major problem takes us to the principles which, as we have noted, are both a basis of criticism of the existing order and objectives toward which to strive. It is not necessary here to elaborate what Marx meant by justice, equality, the primacy of human values over such standards as that of efficiency in the process of production, and the "brotherhood of man." We recall also that he held that the motivation for work should be that of service rather than of self-interest. Marx recognized that in form of statement these criteria sound like Christian ideals. But the difference, he maintained, between him and

Christian advocates of the same principles, was that he expected to put them into practice, whereas Christians were content to leave them in an uncontaminated, transcendental sphere. This urgent drive to put into practice these ideals Macmurray and Berdyaev stress as a great contribution of Marx to principles of Christian ethics. We need not repeat Macmurray's detailed explanation of the way in which ideals and practice became divorced in the history of Christianity or why he thinks that this is the crucial challenge of Marxism to Christianity. Berdyaev also points out that Marxism is more realistic in applying its principles to actual conditions than Christian ethics is and that in this respect Christians have something to learn from Marx.

We have found that all four critics express in their own way their agreement with these Marxist ideals and affirm that they are harmonious with Christian principles. In order to validate this rapprochement of Marxist and Christian principles, the critics draw upon various Christian traditions. Macmurray uses the teachings of Jesus as the norm, or authoritative standard, and asserts that the principles of Marx originally came from Jesus. In order to prove this position, Macmurray is forced to read into the experience and environment of Jesus conditions which exist under capitalism. This approach to Christian ethics Niebuhr flatly rejects. He evokes as the only essential Christian criterion, the principle of love, and affirms that this is manifest in the moral principle of justice. He appeals to reason to verify the assumption that this is the highest moral principle and not to any religious authority. The protest against present conditions in the light of this principle he relates to the stream of prophetic criticism which goes back to Israel's great prophets of the eighth and ninth centuries before Christ. Berdyaev in a general way traces the concern for the poor and oppressed back through Christian history to Jesus, but he finds his chief inspiration for a vigorous, constructive attitude toward social problems in the Russian Christian social critics of the nineteenth century. The emphasis upon the brotherhood of man and the collective salvation of humanity he finds expressed in the history of Russian Orthodoxy. Tillich turns to the spirit of Protestantism for support in his criticism of the social order. He, Berdyaev, and Niebuhr in addition to the streams of Christian tradition already mentioned turn for inspiration to the ancient Hebrew prophets.

A free spirit of inquiry and validation characterizes the approach of all the critics to the traditions and institutions of Christianity. We find differences of emphasis but in general the same spirit of freedom from dogmatism in expressing what they consider the ethical truths of Christianity.

The Relation of Marx's Method of Social
Reconstruction to Christian Ethics

We turn now to the problems and issues involved in the transition from the "unjust," "dehumanizing," "oppressive" conditions under capitalism to the world of Christian and Marxist ideals. Marx did not claim to introduce anything new in the way of objectives. These he shared with many others. He did claim to set forth a method by means of which radical, that is, basic, social reconstruction could come about. This involved, as we know, certain assumptions regarding the relation of the productive system to the state, the developmental nature of the productive system itself, the dialectic interplay between the mechanical factors of capitalism and the will of a revolutionary class. We shall not attempt a summary of the views of the Christians upon these problems but rather a brief outline of the conflicting views and issues which have emerged as the critics sought to examine this aspect of Marx in the light of Christian principles. These fall into three chief problems:

1. The first of these is the problem of historical necessity and freedom which Berdyaev discusses more fully than the other two.¹ Since Berdyaev attributes to Marxist philosophy only the element of necessity and denies to it any element of freedom, he is compelled upon ethical grounds to reject Marx's philosophy of change. Ethical choice must assume freedom to choose between alternatives and freedom to actualize hitherto unrealized possibilities. Both of these prerequisites he asserts Marxism denies. The reality of freedom is primary; the future is wide open. In the light of this premise it is obvious that Berdyaev would have to reject, even if he interpreted it correctly, any dialectic interpretation of history which involved "given structural" necessities.

In sharp contrast to this interpretation of Marx, Tillich

¹The two refers to Niebuhr and Tillich. Macmurray's aberration in interpreting the "dialectic" of Marx eliminates him from any place in this particular issue.

holds that the recognition of structural necessities is basic to any understanding of how history may be changed. The discovery that the capitalistic mode of production constitutes the basic structural necessity of our day Tillich attributes to Marx. He believes that freedom is also an essential category in any theory of historical change, but it is freedom to choose within very limited spheres, e.g., the choice between socialism and chaos. The differences in viewpoint between Tillich and Berdyaev are closely related to their sociological starting points, Berdyaev rejecting as "given" much of Marx's socio-economic data and Tillich accepting these as valid factors. It is clear that Tillich's and Marx's pattern of thinking upon this particular issue are similar. It is therefore possible for Tillich to accept in general categories the dialectic interpretation of Marx's theory of change.¹

Niebuhr has lifted out of Marx the element of necessity, that is, the inevitability of class conflict, and has converted this into a universal category. This problem of how to deal with this historical factor becomes for him crucial. We therefore found this emphasized in his thinking to the exclusion of any adequate treatment of Marx's total dialectic interpretation of history.

We can see that the Christian background of the critics in no way brings unanimity into the criticism of this Marxist problem. Tillich draws chiefly upon the vocabulary of J. Boehme to give the concept, "structural necessities," a cosmic frame of reference. Niebuhr asserts that "orthodox Christianity" has always held that there was evil for which neither God nor man is responsible. It is this doctrine which gives understanding, he explains, to the brute necessities of history. Berdyaev, who does not think that such "necessities" exist, stresses the freedom of the individual to draw upon the divine resources in the universe for creative social change.

2. The significant omission, which the critics repeatedly point out, in Marx's theory of social change is the rôle of the individual. Berdyaev levels the severest criticism against

¹Tillich, in pointing out the theological implications of this view of history, departs from Marx. These differences will be discussed later.

Marx on this score. He points out that Marx completely subordinated the individual to the group, thereby destroying the seed of any kind of creative social action. By stressing the essential place which the individual has in the discovery and realization of ethical values Berdyaev does not thereby deny the function of the group in bringing about change. Niebuhr in sharp contrast to Berdyaev accepts the Marxist view that the individual is impotent in the major clashes of collective bodies and that only the group is effective in changing social institutions and inter-group relationships.

Tillich again assumes the mediating position. He brings together the emphasis which both Marx and Niebuhr place upon the group, and the necessity for individual decision which Berdyaev considers a significant omission in Marx. He binds into a knot, which cannot be pulled apart, the necessity for individual participation and leadership and for proletariat collective action. He does so by explaining that the individual stands at the center of historical forces, that he experiences within his own soul the tension between the compulsion of the class struggle and freedom of choice. This position of ambiguity, of "fate," demands decision for the proletariat cause. Once the decision is made the individual finds himself within the ranks of the proletariat. As a class the proletariat must achieve inner solidarity and mutuality in order to bring about the socialist society. Thus the individual and the class become mutually inter-dependent and equally essential to the process of social change.

Although it is clear that this problem involves sociological investigation and historical corroboration, the approach in terms of social scientific data is not made by any of the three critics here mentioned. They turn instead to the Christian view that the call of God to serve one's fellows comes to concrete expression in the decision of individuals. It is through individuals, moreover, that tolerance, good-will, dynamic are introduced into the social struggle, write Berdyaev and Tillich. Niebuhr agrees that these are the fruits of religion but he does not think that they can be expressed effectively by individuals in the conflict of classes.

3. The final problem is that of methodology, or the place of force in Marx's system. Marx did not deny the usefulness of other methods of change but he did hold that in the moment

of crisis the final overthrow of capitalism could not take place without violence. This becomes a central issue in any discussion of the relation of Marx to Christian ethics. We find among our critics the widest divergence of views. Macmurray dismisses this problem in short order by denying that force should be advocated or used. Berdyaev treats it at length and repudiates force on ethical grounds. It represents to him the divorce of ends and means which is so fundamental as to make impossible the achievement of anything ethical. He maintains that brotherhood cannot be achieved by cutting even deeper the cleavages between men; respect for personality is not heightened by the ruthless disregard of personalities.

Niebuhr, in contrast, maintains that coercive methods are necessary to move from a capitalistically controlled state to a socialist state. Because of the strong opposition within Christian ethics to the use of force, Niebuhr is compelled to make an ethical justification of it which will meet the reactions of the sensitive Christian conscience. His sociological theory is one element in that justification. He states that it is essential that Christians be willing to accept and face facts. Marx's theory of class conflict is claimed by Niebuhr to be descriptive of facts which Christian ethics cannot ignore. In the second place, he asserts that the group with the highest ethical aims is morally justified in using whatever methods make possible the attainment of these ends, provided they do so from motives of goodwill. In view of this, he defends the Marxist advocacy of the proletariat revolution. It is the group with the highest ethical objective, that of justice. This is morally superior to that of the existing forces which use coercion in the name of law and order. From the viewpoint of strategy the use of coercion by the proletariat is to be reserved for those occasions which give reasonable promise of success. These then are the arguments which Niebuhr gives for integrating the Marxist theory of social reconstruction with Christian ethics.

Tillich reserves the use of force for the revolutionary situation. This, he says, exists when the government, which must necessarily use coercion to preserve order in society, has lost the explicit or implicit consent of the masses of people which it rules. Such is the state of affairs under capitalism, since those in control of the governments are using the military forces

of the state merely to keep themselves in power. If and when the proletariat wins the support of the majority in the nation, it is justified in wresting by forceful means the control of the government from the present ruling group. It is clear that Tillich and Niebuhr differ in their treatment of Marx's methodology. Tillich follows Marx in reserving the use of force for the crisis situation but he departs from Marx by affirming that a measure of coercion will always have to be exercised by the state in order to preserve and express any kind of collective unity and order. Niebuhr, on the other hand, lifts out from Marx his description of the final transition from capitalism to socialism and makes the necessity for coercion a universal characteristic of all inter-group relationships in the political sphere.

It should be pointed out that none of the critics agree with Marx in relying exclusively upon motives of self-interest in building a different social order. They recognize that a motive of love or the desire to serve one's fellowmen does exist and that this must be cultivated in behalf of the cause of socialism. This view is held even by Niebuhr who is most pessimistic as to how the altruism of individuals can be made effective in the larger social problems. This insight into human nature, which receives the consent of all four critics, is attributed to the Christian understanding of man.

These divergences from Marx and from each other in the critics' thought are due to differences in sociological starting points, in ethical principles, and to the emphasis which is placed upon the Christian conception of man. It has become clear that the identification of oneself with the proletarian cause is not to be equated necessarily with the acceptance of Marx's theory of social change, for example, both Berdyaev and Macmurray find themselves supporting the proletarian cause but neither of them accepts Marx's methodology. It should also be pointed out that the critics have injected into the problem of social change factors which Marx ignored and denied—the relation of social "order" to class conflict, the function of the individual, and the constructive motives which exist as well as the negative or self-seeking incentives to social reconstruction.

The Implications for Theology of Marx's
Total System of Thought

These various elements which have been discussed separately

in this conclusion were woven by Marx into a closely-knit philosophy of history. All factors were pointed to the utopian goal. He anticipated that the existing order would break beneath the weight of its own inherent defects, that "natural law" undergirded and made inevitable this dénouement, and that the emergence of a new social order would come as a clear break in history. The critics (Berdyaev, Tillich, and Niebuhr) unveil the concealed religious eschatology of this view of history. They point out that it is apocalyptic, a revelation of the future which follows the pattern of the Hebrew-Christian predictions. They agree that on a secular level it has all the elements of such a view of history: the fact of judgment, the emergency of a new social order discontinuous with the present one, the collective salvation of mankind made possible through the rôle of the "chosen ones," and finally the reliance upon some super-personal force to bring this to pass. Tillich, however, cautions against the identification of these typological similarities with agreement in content. All four critics point out that in spite of the fact that Marx disclaimed any religious or metaphysical orientation, he nonetheless assumed it. They point out that Marx was a humanist and a believer in the doctrine of progress. The critics point out that here Christian and Marxist thought do not meet and that on a theological basis there can be no reconciliation between the two. We shall briefly summarize the chief reasons for this criticism of Marx.

Marx's view carries the negative idea that history passes judgment upon man. The critics (with the exception of Macmurray) agree that Marx was right in his anticipation of the inherently self-defeating character of capitalism. But the reason which they then give for this is much more profound than that of Marx. Marx's argument rested upon his analysis of the productive system and upon the assumption that nature was harmonious, orderly, and developmental. The critics push this self-defeating character of capitalism back to man's responsibility for the system and the social order. This they cannot discuss apart from man's relation to God and the destruction which inevitably follows when man ignores the demands of God. Tillich most clearly and vividly of all the critics portrays socialism as a demand of God upon which depends social salvation. The awareness of God's judgment leads the critics to be more critical of self and society than Marx ever was. They (Macmurray being an exception) repudiate Marx's view

that man has no sense of guilt for the evil which exists in the social order. They also criticize Marx for not placing himself and his ideas under the same judgment of history which condemns capitalism and bourgeois culture. We see this difference between Marx and the critics clearly brought out in their analyses of Marx's theory of ideology and of proletariat mission. In both instances they point out that Marx was not willing to submit his ideas and "his" social group to self-criticism and objective judgment. This attitude the Christian critics point out is one of spiritual pride and contrary to the spirit of anyone devoted to the service of God.

The three critics (Tillich, Niebuhr, and Berdyaev) also differ from Marx at the point where he projects the judgment of history to some time in the future. The critics maintain that the judgment of history awaits no future epoch; it is a fact of present existence. This idea is contained in Tillich's term, the "existential moment." Berdyaev explains in other words:

We are witnessing a judgment upon not one epoch in history, but upon history itself. And in this sense we live in an apocalyptic time; in the sense only, and not in the sense of the swift arrival of the end of the world..... The apocalypse is not merely a revelation of the end of the world: it is also a revelation of the inner events of history, of the internal judgment upon history itself. And this is what is happening now.¹

This general criticism of Marx is made from the critics' Christian background. They ally themselves with the Hebrew-Christian prophetic tradition and express their faith in a transcendent God before whom all human endeavor, achievements, and wisdom become relative. Niebuhr would of course say at this point that these become "as filthy rags." It is, accordingly, not the external economic mechanism as such which stands condemned before God; it is the use which men make of such "things" which brings down the judgment of God. Tillich further narrows down this historical stream of Christianity by asserting that Protestantism most sharply channels and expresses the continuing spirit of the prophetic tradition. He finds his inspiration most completely in the Protestant protest against any claim to sacredness by any movement, individual, or institution. The judgment

¹Nicolas Berdyaev, The Fate of Man (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1935), p. 2.

of history becomes thus in the critics' thought more penetrating than in Marx and of immediate and present significance to men.

Macmurray stands outside of the prophetic tradition. His own stress falls upon the immanence of God in history and in the social process. This identity of religion with whatever degree of social cooperation and mutuality exists results in a non-critical attitude toward Marx at this point. In fact, he seems to take the same attitude as that of Marx to the experience of guilt, explaining that it is due to external conditions rather than to man's own shortcomings. He asserts that Jesus taught that with changed social conditions the sense of guilt would vanish.

The positive elements in Marx's eschatology point to a new social order in which man will come into his own and know the full meaning of his own destiny. Two fundamental objections are made by the critics to this view. In the first place, all four critics deny the romanticism and utopianism of this expectation. The fact of judgment which we have just sketched is an experience to which every generation will be subjected. Therefore, no future society, according to the critics, will ever achieve perfection or complete wisdom. The goal of brotherhood and of mutuality or communion will always recede. All four critics account for this fact in terms of the depth of man's longing for community not only with his fellow men but also with God. Given the high yearnings of man, there can never be the attainment of perfect understanding and mutuality which the critics find in Marx's hopes of the future. This refutation of Marx arises out of a view of human nature which is at variance with that of Marx. They contend that Christianity takes into account the deepest needs and highest hopes of man and affirm that these cannot be understood apart from man's relation to God. For these insights Marxist eschatology has no place.

On still another score the critics reject Marx's apocalypticism. Because they deny that at any time in the future there will be fulfilment of man's dreams, they can perceive meaning in the present which Marx never saw. Tillich uses the term "Kairos," "the fulfillment of time," as a border-line concept which takes into account both the drive for a future brave new world and the ultimate meaning of the present. The demands for a new order arise out of the present social situation and actually lead to the realization of that new order, holds Tillich, when they become

"theonomously" oriented in the lives of individuals. Berdyaev expresses much the same thought when he affirms that each generation must discover its own objectives and its own highest loyalties. Such illumination and understanding of life's ultimate meaning are not reserved for any generation in the future, Berdyaev repeatedly emphasizes. He points out dangers in the projection into the future of lofty purposes. These make men apprehensive and anxious, and deprive them of the spontaneity and freedom of ethical choice. "The task of the ethics of creativeness," explains Berdyaev, "is to make the perspective of life independent of the fatal march of time, of the future which terrifies and torments us."¹ The triumph over time can be achieved in the vertical line between man and God, in "the triumphant passage from the historical to the super-historical process,"² which is possible at any moment in time.

Although Macmurray has no discussion of this phase of Marx's thought in terms of eschatology, he makes essentially the same criticism of Marx. He maintains that the relationship of man to the eternal is possible at any time in history, and that it is in this vertical line rather than in the horizontal one of social evolution that the ultimate meaning of life is to be found.

Another distinction among the critics should be noted. Niebuhr, in contrast to Berdyaev, Macmurray, and Tillich, stresses the chasm which exists between the eternal and the temporal. He holds that the eternal does not manifest itself in the collective enterprises of mankind and that "social salvation," as here defined, will never be possible. The belief in the immanence of God in the social process which is present in the other three critics does not appear in Niebuhr's thought.

This brings to a close the analysis of the chief issues in the critics' treatment of Marx. We have made the artificial distinction between the social and economic data of Marx's system and his ethical and philosophical principles. The differing analyses which the critics make of the former Marxist elements bring into sharp contrast their own knowledge of the social

¹Berdyaev, Destiny of Man (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 187.

²Berdyaev, Meaning of History (London: Centenary Press, 1936), p. 200.

sciences. It has become clear that the acceptance, rejection, or modification of these elements by the critics depends upon their sociological premises, and not upon Christian principles of ethics. We have shown that there is general agreement among the critics that Marxist ethical ideals are close to, if not identical with, the objectives of Christian ethics. Although these "Christian objectives" or principles are found in various streams of the Christian tradition, there is a consensus as to what these principles are. We have analyzed the differences of interpretation and of evaluation in regard to Marx's theory of social change and have indicated at what points these are due to differing philosophical assumptions or sociological premises. It has become evident that there is no agreement as to what constitutes the "Christian" interpretation of Marx's methodology. And, finally, the critics have been found to agree that Marx's thought cannot be treated apart from its theological implications. This, as we have noted, leads them to reject the metaphysical basis of Marx's eschatology and to view in a totally different perspective the meaning of collective salvation and man's ultimate destiny.

